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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Note verbale dated 8 March 2017 from the Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva addressed to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva presents its compliments to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and has the honour to provide herewith the comments of the Government of Greece in relation to the written statement by the Federal Union of European Nationalities, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (A/HRC/34/NGO/79) (see annex).

The Permanent Mission of Greece kindly requests the Office of the High Commissioner to circulate the present note verbale and the annex* as a document of the thirty-fourth session of the Human Rights Council under agenda item 3.

* Reproduced as received, in the language of submission only.

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Annex to the note verbale dated 8 March 2017 from the Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva addressed to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Comments of the Greek Government in relation to the written statement A/HRC/34/NGO/79 submitted by the Federal Union of European Nationalities

It is deplorable that FUEN plays into the hands of Turkish foreign policy, instead of assuming an activity that would justify its name as a "Federal Union of European Nationalities" and that would display the organization as a genuine "non governmental" one. There is enough evidence that there is no other political bias than the one which drives FUEN's activity, taking into account that its Vice-President, Mr. Halit Habip Oğlu, also serves as the President of the "Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe", one of the three organizations mentioned in FUEN's statement and allegedly speaking on behalf of the Muslim minority in Thrace.

The so-called "political deterrence and intimidation" is a discriminating behavior for the side of FUEN, given that for two years it refuses to examine the applications and accept the registration of other minority associations from the region, namely three Pomak NGOs, despite the fact that they have regularly submitted their applications. These three organizations ("Cultural Union of the Pomaks of the Prefecture of Xanthi", "Panhellenic Association Pomaks" and "Pomak Research Centre") are refused to join the (non-inclusive) FUEN organization, because they are Pomaks and apparently they would contribute to its objectivity and would seriously challenge the Turkish official line supported by FUEN that "the minority is Turkish", instead of Muslim, disregarding the rights of other Muslim groups that comprise it.

To add insult to injury, FUEN is intentionally lying when referring to the provisions of the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty in regard with the minority. We stress that, according to the Treaty "the minority is defined as Muslim and not as Turkish, for the mere reason that Roma and Pomaks are also members of the minority". In fact, Article 45 of the Treaty goes as follows:

Article 45

"The rights conferred by the provisions of the present Section on the non-Moslem minorities of Turkey will be similarly conferred by Greece on the Moslem minority in her territory".

We challenge FUEN to reproduce the exact wording, if any, of the Treaty, which refers to a "Turkish minority in Thrace", if it wishes to gain some credibility and turn down our assertion that it intentionally lies. We also regret that lying is a standard practice of FUEN during the tenure as FUEN Vice-President of Mr. Halit Habip Oğlu, which unfortunately also continues under the new leadership of FUEN's President, Mr. Loránt Vincze. As a result, it is a pity to view our expectations from the new Presidium, as expressed in our statement during the 33rd session of the Human Rights Council, being dashed.

It is a shame that the statement neglects the beneficial status of the Muslim minority, which makes it as one of the most prioritized minorities in Europe, thanks to the measures of positive discrimination taken by the Greek State. Instead, FUEN provides with misleading information, trying to present a fake concept of a minority group under pressure and intimidation.

For instance, regarding the directive of 24 March 2016 and the document sent by the educational counselors of minority education about the confusion caused in the educational community, it has to be clarified that it was issued with the aim of solving problems observed by the educational community in cases where the provisions of the Lausanne Treaty for educational matters were not fully met. In fact, according to the Treaty and the related cultural protocols, the minority schools are bilingual. Thereupon, despite the firm position of Greece for the unhindered use of both languages in the minority educational programmes, it has been observed that one of the two languages is not being used in certain procedures connected to the school operation (announcements to students etc.) and to teachers' representation in official school management bodies.

Furthermore, the operation of certain minority schools has been suspended to achieve both better socialization of the students and better[1] and effective[2] education. The main aim is to upgrade minority education through larger minority school units which has been the case in general education for several years. However, if the student body of these settlements increases in the near future, their re-opening shall be re-examined, as the suspension of their functioning is temporary. In the meantime, the Directorates of Primary Education ensure the transportation of students to the host schools by adding more transportation itineraries to the existing ones, whereas taxis, coaches and mini-buses are hired by the authorities on this purpose.

It is more regrettable that FUEN rests on views expressed by the so-called "elected Mufti". Mr. Ahmet Mete, who has expressed in the recent pass racist statements backing Hitler's opinions and practices against the Jews, statements that provoked harsh reaction of the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece. Does this mean that FUEN is official backing anti-Semitic and neo-nazi rhetoric?

As for the mayor of Iasmos, media reports confirm that he was repeatedly using the duty car of the municipality for private purposes. The authorities went on to arrest him after being informed about that from complaints made by the citizens.

With regard to the decision made by Members of Parliament (MPs) to file a complaint against the "FEP" party, we wonder why we need to remind to FUEN that in a democratic society there is separation of powers, and the government is not accountable for the acts of the MPs.

It is also really questionable, why FUEN, which is supposed to care for minority rights across Europe, pays no attention to the minority rights of the Greek minority in Turkey protected by the abovementioned Treaty as well. Indeed, despite the fact that during the tenure of President Mr. Loránt Vincze the dwindling Greek minority in Turkey, especially in Istanbul, has seen its unspeakable difficulties being aggravated, FUEN has not issued a single statement in this respect. Such difficulties have no equivalent in the Muslim minority in Greece and include i.a. continuous impediment of the Greek minority to elect their own administrative boards for its charitable foundations, seizure of its properties, targeted inheritance impediments, transformation of churches into mosques, shut-down of historical monasteries such as Panaya Sumela etc. The 2016 annual Progress Report of the European Commission can provide ample material should FUEN decide to sincerely deal with minority issues.

We sincerely hope that FUEN and its Board will use this forum in a more constructive and objective way, as it is required for an organization that wants to be impartially exposed to the international community; otherwise their credibility and reliability remain at stake.

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[1] The aim pursued is that the schools where students shall be hosted (provided that distance allows it) are larger minority school units with better infrastructure and equipment. Thus, in these host schools there is more teaching time within a class per subject, full-day school programs are provided with more class periods of language courses, there are qualified teachers specialized in teaching foreign languages, or art, music etc. and programs of innovative activities are offered (Health Promotion, Environmental Education, Cultural activities).

[2] For the last years there has been a gradual downward trend of the total student numbers in schools of which the operation is suggested to be suspended.

We therefore urge FUEN to emancipate from the Habip Oğlu iron ball on its feet and address minority issues objectively, in a fair and impartially way.